

BERRIEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes
August 5, 2021

CHAIRMAN TO CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER:

Chairperson Elliott called the regular meeting to order at 8:35 A.M. in the Board of Commissioners' (BOC) room at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main Street, St. Joseph, Michigan.

ROLL CALL:

Chairperson Elliott instructed the Clerk to take a roll call with the following results:

12 PRESENT: Rayonte Bell, Jim Curran, Teri Sue Freehling, Robert Harrison, Jon Hinkelman, Michael Majerek, Don Meeks, Ezra Scott, David Vollrath, Julie Wuerfel, Mamie Yarbrough and R. McKinley Elliott.

0 ABSENT.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE JULY 15, 2021 MEETING:

Commissioner Scott moved, seconded by Commissioner Meeks, to approve the last Committee of the Whole minutes held on July 15, 2021. Motion carried, no nays.

PUBLIC COMMENTS – Per the Berrien County Board of Commissioners' Bylaws, those speaking during public comments may do so no longer than two minutes and shall identify themselves by name and city, township, or village. (Article III, 3.9B-C):

Cindy Beltran, Stevensville – As a parent with students in Lakeshore Schools she spoke about advocating for parents to have the choice of making their children wear masks at school or to be vaccinated or not.

Vedette Pallas-Cordes, St. Joseph – Spoke about the mental implications that mask wearing and online education have had on her children.

Chairperson Elliott spoke in regard to the public's concerns regarding forcing schools to require masks and vaccinations.

SCHEDULED DISCUSSION:

Medical Examiner Update – Dr. Joyce L. deJong

Dr. deJong presented a summary of all Berrien County cases:

	2019	2020
Total Deaths in the County	1,622	1,867
Deaths Reported to the ME	430	596
Deaths Investigated	399	540
MEI Scene Investigations	535	461
Death Certificates by ME	152	207
Bodies Transported to WMed	132	152
Complete Autopsy	90	103
Limited Autopsy	5	4

External Examination	26	25
Storage Only at WMed	11	20
Total Cases with Toxicology	110	126
Unidentified Remains After Exam	1	3
Referrals to Gift of Life	80	137
Tissue Donations	7	8
Cornea Donations	4	7
Unclaimed Investigations	10	19
Exhumations	1	0

Dr. deJong also presented numbers on the Cremation Permit Authorizations, Manners of Death Reported, Deaths Reported by Age, Pediatric Deaths, Accidental Deaths by Mechanism, Drug-Related Deaths by Manner, Suicides by Sex and Age, and Suicides by Mechanism.

This report is available to view at www.berriencounty.org in the Agenda Center for the Board of Commissioners.

Back to School and COVID-19 Update – Health Officer Courtney Davis

Health Officer Davis presented a PowerPoint presentation:

COVID-19 Response Goals

- To decrease the transmission of COVID-19 in Berrien County and to protect our most vulnerable residents from undue illness and death;
- To protect the capacity of our local health system to ensure that they can safely provide health care to all residents in need; and
- To support and promote the overall physical, mental and emotional health of all community members and pandemic response partners.

Return to Learn for 2021-2022 School Year

- Whereas in-person learning has been shown to provide the greatest benefit to community youth, and where ensuring this can happen consistently and safely during the upcoming school year has been deemed a priority of public health and education partners.
- Through an ongoing partnership of public health and education partners, the following guidance is meant to support school districts in planning for a successful return to the classroom this fall and to ensure that COVID-19 prevention and mitigation measures are implemented in a way that fosters optimal learning environments while simultaneously ensuring health and safety for the overreaching school-district community (students and staff alike).
- Local public health will provide ongoing monitoring of community transmission in Berrien County and the surrounding region. This activity will allow the Berrien County Health Department to support school superintendents and administrators in making informed and educated decisions that are best for school operations, students and staff. BCHD will provide updates and adjust recommendations based on the CDC’s predesignated indicators and thresholds for community transmission of COVID-19.

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OTHER BUSINESS:

Beginning next Wednesday, August 11th, the COVID-19 briefings will resume on the second and fourth Wednesday of the month at 11:00 A.M. via Zoom.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 A.M.

R. McKinley Elliott, Chairperson

Diane Mensinger, Chief Deputy Clerk

Minutes are to be approved at the next Committee of the Whole meeting.